

## **The Phenomenon of Slips of The Ear by English Education Department Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study seeks to investigate the phenomenon of slips of the ear by English Education Department students. Data were taken from 10 students from different semester and have minimum 500 TOEFL score. Data were analyzed qualitatively supported by descriptive quantification and based on Bond's (2005) slips of the ear theories. The findings show that the errors occur in lexical level and syntactical levels. The factors of the occurrences of slips of the ear can be because of the lack of lexical knowledge, the accent and dialect, the unfamiliarity with the words, or difficulties in segmenting utterances. The result of this study shows that the errors which occur most in all categories is in syntactical level, which is ill-formed utterances. Furthermore, this study supports the previous studies of slips of the ear proposed by Kusumarasdyati (2005) who states that when the listeners misperceive the utterances, they will add, omit, or substitute the utterances.

**Keywords:** *slips of the ear, music, lyrics, lexical, syntax*

## INTRODUCTION

People speak to others and listen to other's utterances every day. It is the way they keep communicating with others. In daily conversations, people speak when they want to deliver messages or ideas, or share their experiences with other people. On the other hand, people listen to other's utterances if they think that the utterances are important or interesting. These situations can happen in formal and informal occasions.

In a conversation, it cannot be denied that sometimes people fail to perceive the utterances correctly. This is when slips of the ear happen. Slip of the ear is a phenomenon where a hearer fails in perceiving messages and how the hearer recognizes words (Bond, 2005).

Most people cannot hear the words, which are being uttered, clearly in crowded places or there are some sounds which can cause misheard or slips of the ear. Besides, slips of the ear can happen because of a similar sound of word or phrase in speech or conversation (Nordquist, 2013). In English, for example,

“quiet” and “quite” have almost similar sounds in pronunciation but have different meanings. Slips of the ear can show the way people catch what another speaker tends to say by looking at their linguistics knowledge. When the hearer perceives differently from what the speaker has said, the hearer tries to recover the utterances (Bond, 2005).

In fact, when people listen to music in a different language from their own mother tongue, misperception might occur. It cannot be determined whether the hearer misperceives the lyrics because of the “noise”, the unfamiliar words, or dialects and accents (Field, 2004). In slips of the ear, the speaker produces the words correctly but the mistake is made by the hearer. Some sounds of music instruments can affect the perception phonemes or words. It can be called as “noise” (Vitevitch, 2002).

The first phenomenon of slips of the ear is called ‘Mondegreens’. It is because the misheard of the line “And laid him on the green” and because of that misheard, slips of the ear can be usually called as ‘Mondegreens’.

The errors, however, are not only made by second language learners, native speakers also make errors in listening. The line “This slope is Treacherous” in Taylor Swift’s song, titled ‘Treacherous’, is perceived as “This love is Treacherous” by people (Lyrics Mania, 2014).

The phenomenon slips of the ear is interesting to be investigated because slips of the ear can happen everyday in every conversation but not many linguists have investigated this field (Perwitasari, 2003). There are some related previous studies which deal with slips of the ear. Kusumarasdyati (2005) discusses that slips of the ear, which are performed by non-native speakers, could occur in four linguistic levels: phonological, morphological, lexical, and sentential. When people could not hear what words had been said by the speaker, they would try to interpret the words as close as the original by omitting, adding or substituting the sounds, morphemes, words and sentences. The slips of the ear can occur for some reason, it can be the unfamiliar words, lack of lexical

knowledge, and dialect. It cannot be denied that sometimes the listener perceives non words or adds words and the result is different with the original utterance. Perwitasari (2013) investigated the slips of the ear by focusing on the vowel perception. In her study, Perwitasari argues that the long and short vowel sounds (the vowel sound /I/ and /i:/) are difficult to distinguish by Indonesian learners of English (Perwitasari, 2013). Meanwhile, Setiyawan and Widyastuti’s (2014) state that consonants /g/, /r/, /k/ and /dʒ/ are frequently misperceived more by Surabaya indie rock music singers than vowels. Only vowel /ɔ:/ was misperceived by Surabaya indie rock music singers. The errors occurred in their phonetic knowledge when they listened to music.

Among those three previous studies, none of them investigates slips of the ear which occurs in listening to music. Those previous studies focus on slips of the ear which occur in listening to conversations. Therefore, the present study aims at transcribing the utterances by examining the slips of the ear which

uses songs as the media of analysis. In addition, this present study uses Bond's (2005) slips of the ear theory as the main theory in analyzing slips of the ear

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

There are, at least, four basic skills in learning language, for example; listening, reading, writing, and speaking. One of the hardest language skills for non-native learners in understanding native speaker's utterances is listening (Perwitasari, 2013). In addition, Buck (2001, cited in Perwitasari, 2013) stated there are some processes in listening. First, listeners listen to utterances which contain phrases, clauses, cohesive makers, stresses, and intonation. Second, listeners try to determine the speech whether it is songs, news, movies, and so on. Third, the listeners try to understand the topic by using their background knowledge which relates to the topic. Listeners will give the meaning and interpret the context. The last, listeners receive the information from

short-term memory to long-term memory.

In fact, non-native learners sometimes make a mistake in listening to what is being uttered. This phenomenon is called slips of the ear. Slip of the ear is an error of misperception in listening by mistaking a word or phrase because of a similar-sounding word or phrase in speech or conversation (Nordquist, 2013). In addition, Bond (2005) stated that slip of the ear is a unique window to see how people use their linguistics knowledge in perceiving and understanding utterances. It can cause a different understanding between the speakers and the listeners.

Slip of the ear is also known as 'Mondegreen' the famous misheard of a Scottish ballad entitled "The Bonnie Earl O' Moray". Most people cannot hear the utterances clearly when they are being distracted by noises or when the signal is ambiguous. It is the reason why song lyrics are frequently misheard by listeners (Fernández & Cairns, 2010). Slips of the ear in listening to music are common phenomena nowadays, for example in the song entitled "Cool

Kids” by Echosmith. People mishear hear I wish that I could like the cookies while the original lyrics is I wish that I could be like the cool kids or the line I’m bringing booty back in “All About That Bass” song by Meghan Trainor is misheard as I’m bringing goodie bags (Wall, 2015).

Perwitasari (2013) states that there are two factors which cause slips of the ear, they are inter-language and extra-language. Inter-language process is the process when listeners transfer their mother tongue to the language which is being heard. While extra-language is the process when the first language influences the second language. Listeners try to understand the target language based on an existing language comprehension in the first language.

In slips of the ear phenomena, when listeners misperceive words, they produce different words and think that they hear those words. The errors which are made by the listeners show the way they segment the utterances and how they represented in their mental lexicon (Bond, 2005).

According to Bond (2005), slips of the ear can occur in five

levels. They are phonetic knowledge, phonological knowledge, lexical knowledge, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. This present study focuses on slips of the ear which occur in lexical knowledge and syntax level.

#### Lexical Knowledge

Lexemes are words which exist in dictionary and have meanings. Therefore, lexical semantics is a study which concern with word meaning (Paradis, 2012). In slips of the ear phenomena, when listeners misperceive words, they produce different words and think that they hear those words. The errors in lexical consist of non words, word boundaries, content and function words, and morphology.

First is non words. Non words are words or lexemes which do not have meaning or do not exist in target language. There are two reasons for the occurrences of non words in slips of the ear (Bond, 2005). The first is because of proper names or specialized vocabulary and the second is because the speakers’ dialect and accents. The example of non words is showed as follows:

Clear → clee

The word clear is pronounced r-less because the speaker uses British accent. The listeners perceives clear as clee which does not exist in English vocabulary. The listener fails to perceive the last sound of the word and think the word is r-less.

Second, word boundaries show the way people segment the utterances in order to understand the utterances (Cutler & McQueen, 1995). In fact, the word boundary in casual speech is difficult to be recognized because it is a continuous stream. The misperception of word boundary can occur because of the differences of the way people speak. English is a language which its words have to be pronounced by employing stress but the native speakers tend to speak without any pauses. It is different from Indonesian people who tend to employ gaps or short pauses when they speak. For example:

Come clean → convince

The listener perceives the first word as a strong syllable of a word and the second word as a weak syllable of a word. As the result, the

boundary between the words come and clean is lost.

Third is content and function words. Content words include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. In contrast, function words include pronouns, determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, and auxiliary verbs. Moreover, in slips of the ear, listeners might add, omit, or substitute a morpheme (Kusumarasdyati, 2005). In addition, Bond (2005) states that the error can occur in inflectional and derivational processes. For example:

Forces → force and

The listener adds the boundary before a weak syllable. The listener misperceives the suffix –es which indicates plural as function word and.

### Syntax

Syntax is a study of sentence formation or structure. It describes how words fit together to make grammatical sentences (Thomas, 1993).

Slip of the ear can occur in syntactic level where the utterances contain many errors and cannot be determined what is being misperceived (Bond, 2005). The

errors in syntax consist of well-formed and ill-formed utterances, and argument structure and function.

First is well-formed and ill-formed utterances. Basically, the English utterances are grammatically correct. However, it cannot be denied that some of misperceptions produce ungrammatical utterances or ill-formed utterances. It is important to note that the writer of song sometimes ignore grammar in writing lyrics, In order to get a perfect rhyme.

Well-formed utterances can also be called as grammatical structures are the utterances which follow the rules of sentence structure of language (Johnson, 1994). In slips of the ear, well-formed utterances occur when the listener misperceives word and add or omit some words in order to make the sentence grammatically correct. For example:

Looking at it now → I'm looking at it now

The listener might think that the lyrics are not syntactically well-formed because there is no subject. As a result, the listener adds subject and linking verb as required in order to make the sentences well-formed.

In contrast, ill-formed utterances or ungrammatical utterances are the utterances which do not follow the rules of sentence structure of language. It does not correspond to the utterance in appropriate ways (Johnson, 1994). For example:

Door wide open heaven knows →

Though wide open never knows

The listener misperceives the noun door as conjunction though and heaven as adverb never. As the result, the listener produces a fragment sentence because a noun is absent in the sentence.

Second is argument structure and function. Allen (2009, p. 217) states that argument structure is the specification of the number and types of arguments required for a verb in that structure to be well-formed. In other words, argument structure is a phrase which has a function to complete the meaning of the verb. Argument structure is divided into two categories. Different with ill-formed utterances, in argument structure, the listeners tend to

misperceive the utterance and change the function of the utterances but they will recover the utterances in order to make the sentence grammatically correct. For example:

But we were in screaming color → Could we were in screaming color

The listener misperceives the conjunction but as modal verb could. As the result, the listener perceives the utterance as a question and it changes the function of the utterances.

## RESEARCH METHOD

his study applied a descriptive qualitative approach because this study analyzed data by observing misperception which has made by students. A qualitative approach is relevant to this study since it focuses on the observation in which the data are in descriptive narratives forms such as notes, pictures, videotapes, and recordings (LeCompte & Preissle, 1994). Qualitative research involves non numerical data such as interview research. In addition, it is concerned with opinions and experiences of individuals (Dörney,

2007). It also involves collecting, classifying, evaluating and interpreting (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Descriptive research is concerned with the description of data and the goal is the acquisition of factual, accurate, and systematic data which can be used in averages, frequencies, and similar statistical calculations (Schmidt, 2002). The purposes of the study are to investigate the slips of the ear that happen when students listen to selected music and which sounds are misperceived most by the students. The data are analyzed by using Bond's (2005) theory to examine which part of the lyrics that student misperceived.

### Subjects of the study

The respondents of this present study were ten students from English Education Department, Indonesia University of Education. Ten students are considered to show the misperception in listening to music and the analysis can be more detailed. The purposive sampling was used in this study and the participants who were purposively chosen were based



on the following criteria: male and female students, students from 9th and 11th semester, and students who have minimal 500 Toefl test score. Ten students selected purposively from different semester since they are considered to have different skill in listening and the results will have more variation. The decision of not selecting more participants is intended to avoid sampling error as suggested by Oppong (2013).

#### Data Collection

The data were collected from the students' misperceptions of song lyrics. There were two songs used as the objects of the study, they are "Out of the Woods" by Taylor Swift and "Guns and Horses" by Ellie Goulding. The songs lyrics were taken from official websites of Taylor Swift and Ellie Goulding.

#### Data Analysis

After the data were collected, they were analyzed through several processes. The first step in analyzing the data was identifying sentences which consist of slips of the ear by

comparing the actual lyrics and the respondents' perception. The second step was categorizing data which contain slips of the ear based on the Bond's (2005) types of slips of the ear. The errors were classified into two categories which are lexical level and syntactical level. The errors were classified into lexical level where the errors occur in short phrases or only affect words. In addition, when the errors occur in long phrases, the errors were classified into syntactical level. The last was drawing conclusion from the analysis of the study.

In order to determine the percentage of each error in lexical and syntactical level, the researcher needed to compute numerical data by using a simple scaling composed by Thorsten (1992 in Salma, 2013, pg. 35).

$$P = (F \times 100\%) / N$$

Note:

P = Percentage

F = Frequency

N = Overall Number

#### Examples of Data Analysis

The examples of the analysis can be seen as follows:

Table 3.1

Misperception of non words

Respondent	Actual	Speech
	Perceived Speech	
1	You're on time	You're untield

In the misperception, the respondent [1 misperceives the word on time into untield. The word untield does not exist in English vocabularies and have no meaning.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data show that the phenomenon of slips of the ear can occur when listeners hear utterances from the speakers. In addition, the data show that the errors in slips of the ear can occur in lexical and syntactical level. The errors that occur in lexical level include non words, word boundary, the function and content words, and morphology.

The respondents who listen to music can produce non words. The errors are divided into three categories, they are word boundary, spelling, and sound. The data show that the respondents produced non-

words dominantly because of sound misperception. For example:

Join → joil

It is supported by Shockey & Bond's statement that in casual speech, phonology gives listeners ways to interpret the speech. In fact, listeners can misapply the sounds which are heard by them (Shokey & Bond, 2007). In addition, Kusumarasdyati (2005) argues that when listeners cannot find the words in their mental lexicon, the listeners could produce non-word which phonological well-formed.

Furthermore, there are two categories in misperceiving the word boundaries. The first is the respondents dominantly misperceived the strong syllables as words. For example:

Amount → a mouth

Contrary to what Butterfield & Cutler claim, the data show that the erroneous insertion of a boundary before weak syllables are dominantly occur (Butterfield & Cutler, 1988). The second misperception of word boundary is the deletion of boundary between words. The respondents

misperceived the first word as word initial. For example:

Come clean → complete

It is in line with Kusumarasdyati who argues that casual English speech is a continuous stream while in Indonesia, the speech is tend to be segmented by employing short gaps (Kusumarasdyati, 2005).

The noises when listeners listen to utterances can make the listeners cannot perceive the words clearly. In fact, the misperception of function and content words will occur. The data show that respondents add and omit words when they fail to perceive the utterances. In content words, the respondents dominantly omit than adding words. For example:

I see → see

The deletion of content words occur because the respondents could not catch the utterances, despite of recover them, the respondents tend to omit them. While in function words, the respondents dominantly omit function words. For example:

We've found → we found

Across those misperceptions of function and content words, the respondents dominantly omit

function words. It is supported by Bond's statement that function words are frequently misperceived by listeners because they tend to be unstressed (Bond, 2005).

Moreover, the data show that slips of the ear is related to morphology. The data show that the errors are in addition and deletion of suffix. The errors mostly affect the inflectional affixes which do not change the meaning of the words and only change its word class. The errors occur in misperception of plural and the verb form. For example:

Airplanes → airplane

It is supported by Bond (2005) who states that inflectional affixes are primarily misperceived than derivational. However, the data also show that the errors are commonly in the misperception of verb while Bond (2005) argues that plural suffix is commonly misperceived.

It can be conclude that in lexical level, respondent dominantly misperceive the verb form. The respondents mostly misperceived past form as present form. For example:

You'd feel → you'll feel

It might be because English foreign learners are taught English language from present form and after that past form. In fact, the verbs in English which are in short form are difficult to be perceived if the initial words after the verb have the same sound.

Moreover, the errors in syntactic level are divided into two categories. They are well and ill-formed utterances, and argument structure and function. The data show that ill-formed utterances dominantly occur than well-formed utterances. For example:

You're so quiet → your so quit

The respondents might could not recover the utterances and only rely on the phonological well-formed. It is in line with Bond (2005) who argues that most slips of the ear produce ill-formed and the listeners are not able to analyze the utterances into logical syntactic components. While in argument structure and function, the respondents fail to allocate the words which cause the function of the sentence changes. For example:

Are we out of the woods → we are out of the woods

Sometimes, the respondent misperceives some of utterance portions and recovers it in order to fit the utterances. In fact, it can change the function of the utterances and has a different part of speech. For example:

Two paper → to paper

It can be concluded that in syntax, ill-formed utterances mostly occur. It is in line with Kusumarasdyati (2005) who argues that ill-formed utterances mostly occur when the listeners listen to music compared to if the listeners listen to a speech or conversation. While in argument structure and function, the data show that respondents dominantly misperceive words which have different part of speech than misallocate words. It is supported by Bond (2005) that misperception of internal structure can be misperceived and can cause syntactic errors. The listeners recover the word which has similar sound but have different part of speech.

Moreover, the data show that the errors which occur most in all

categories is ill-formed utterances. Difficulties in segmenting utterances in music can be the reason why the respondents produce ill-formed utterances (Kusumarasdyati, 2005). Phonologically, the respondents almost perceived the lyrics correctly but syntactically ill-formed.

This study discovered all the errors which occur when the respondents listen to music. The occurrences of lexical and syntactical error are presented in Table 4.25 below:

Table 4.25 The Occurrences of Lexical and Syntactical Error

No	Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Lexical	146	67%
1.1	Non words	13	8,9%
1.2	Word boundaries	20	13,7%
1.3	Content words	16	11%

1.4	Function words	44	30,1%
1.5	Morphology	53	36,3%
2	Syntax	72	33%
2.1	Well-formed utterances	7	9,7%
2.2	Ill-formed utterances	54	75%
2.3	Argument structure and function	11	15,3%

Table 4.25 shows the occurrences of lexical and syntactical errors. In addition, Table 4.25 shows that the most frequent errors which made by the students is in lexical level which occurs 67% (146 occurrences) while in syntactical level, the errors occurs 33% (72 occurrences).

## CONCLUSION

This study shows the phenomenon of slips of the ear performed by English Education Department students. In addition, this study focuses on the errors in two levels, they are lexical and syntactical levels. First, the errors occur lexical level include non-words, word boundaries, function and content words, and morphology. Second, the

errors also occur in syntactical level. The errors include well-formed and ill-formed utterances, and argument structure and function.

There are two factors which cause slips of the ear, they are inter-language and extra-language. The first is inter-language process is a process which the respondents fail to perceive the utterances because of the differences of word pronunciation, and the unfamiliarity with the words. While extra-language process is a process where respondents' first language influences the way they perceive the utterances (Perwitasari, 2013).

The data show that the reason of the occurrences of slips of the ear can be because of the lack of lexical knowledge, the accent and dialect, or the unfamiliarity with the words. Moreover, across lexical and syntactical level, the errors dominantly occur in ill-formed utterances, particularly in fragment utterances. The respondents mostly cannot perceive the utterance and instead of recover the words, they omit words which caused the sentences are ungrammatical. It is in

line with Kusumarasdyati (2005) who argues that the occurrences of ill-formed utterances dominantly occur when listeners listen to music compared to when listeners listen to a speech or conversation.

In conclusion, the data show that the most frequent errors occur in lexical level which 146 occurrences. However, the errors which occur most in all categories is ill-formed utterances which 54 occurrences (see Table 4.25). It is in line with Kusumarasdyati (2005) who argues that instead of listening to a speech or conversation, the listeners mostly produce ill-formed utterances when they listen to music. Difficulties in segmenting utterances in music can be the reason why the respondents produce ill-formed utterances (Kusumarasdyati, 2005).

Overall, this current study collaborate the previous studies of slips of the ear proposed by Bond (2005), Perwitasari (2013), and Kusumarasdyati (2005). Besides, this study does not confirm Bond's (2005) statement that plural suffix is commonly misperceived. In addition, this study support the previous study

on slips of the ear by Kusumarasdyati (2005) which show that when the listeners misperceive the utterances, they will add, omit, or substitute the utterances.

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